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SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - FEBRUARY 6

¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

Operation Umoja Wetu (Our Unity)

¶2. (SBU) MONUC reported that on February 5, an RDF battalion marched into Pinga, traditionally an FDLR stronghold, encountering no resistance. FDLR forces have apparently withdrawn further west, either to regroup or to avoid confrontation in the hopes of "waiting out" the operation. Some MONUC sources even speculated that the FDLR could retreat as far as the vast and sparsely populated Maiko Park in Orientale Province. MONUC did, however, note that on February 4 a sizable FDLR group had moved east from Walikale, indicating the possibility of a clash in the area.

¶3. (SBU) FDLR mobilization in South Kivu continues, with the group allegedly blocking exit routes near the towns of Lubhimbi and Lulunkulu, raising fears that the FDLR might hold civilians as hostages or human shields. Further south, the FDLR has reportedly laid traps, such as anti-personnel mines, near Kahenge, Kanenge and Mulenge. Yakutumba Mai Mai have reiterated that they will fight the RDF troops.

¶4. (SBU) Although the GDRC and GoR maintain that Operation Umoja Wetu is a joint effort, MONUC noted that the RDF continues to operate independently in all forward positions. The Joint Operations Center in Goma conducts no operational planning, but cooperation at the most senior military levels - between DRC General Numbi, RDF CHOD Kabarebe, and MONUC Force Commander Gaye - is reportedly excellent. DRC CHOD Etumba, who has been out of the loop in the planning, now reportedly attends FARDC/RDF/MONUC briefings.

¶5. (SBU) MONUC continues to redeploy its bases to anticipate possible FDLR reprisals. Temporary Operating Bases have been established at Ngungu, Kibua, Malemo, and Pinga. MONUC has also begun deploying Joint Protection Teams (JPT), consisting of officials from the Protection, Civil Affairs, and Political Affairs Divisions of MONUC. The JPTs will work alongside MONUC military to help improve protection of civilians.

Integration Efforts

¶6. (SBU) The FARDC proceeds with integration efforts. As of February 5, a total of 1,263 troops integrated into new units, including 632 CNDP troops. MONUC will transport 350 Pareco troops from Beni to Kisangani to undergo integration. Command of the integrated units is mixed.

¶7. (SBU) A prominent Mai Mai leader told Goma PolOff that many Pareco troops were originally recruited from FDLR ranks. With all Pareco factions apparently committed to integration, this creates a situation where FARDC Hutu soldiers will be tasked with fighting their former FDLR colleagues. The contact speculated that some of the integrated troops might contact FDLR forces to divulge FARDC intentions.

¶8. (SBU) According to MONUC Kinshasa, fast-track mobile integration centers have been established at Kikuku, Nyaleke, and Rutshuru. These centers complement the "classic" integration centers at Mubambiro, Rumangabo, and Kimoka. Some contacts in Goma and Kinshasa have raised concerns that rapid integration could entail longer-term risks.

Ituri Update

¶9. (SBU) During a February 5 briefing to the diplomatic community, MONUC noted that the security situation in Ituri has worsened since January 27. On January 28, FPRI rebels attacked the FARDC camp at Tchei, wounding several soldiers. On February 3, FPRI rebels attacked a civilian truck in the area, killing three and wounding others. Some have speculated that this uptick in violence may be related to the on-going trial of Thomas Lubanga, whom the ICC has accused of committing war crimes in Ituri. An ICC team will conduct a fact-finding visit to Ituri this month.

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